

US Army Alaska

Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan

2002 - 2006

Volume 3 Fort Wainwright

**Interim Final
September 2002**

Revisions From Previous Draft Version

- Section 4.1.4.1 Land Rehabilitation and Maintenance has been revised

The following wording has been added to the Proposed Management Section: “USARAK proposes to implement a Training Area Recovery Plan (TARP) program, a rotational system of rest, rehabilitation, and erosion control as part of the proposed action. Each training area on Fort Wainwright will be taken out of rotation and placed off limits to military and recreational vehicle once every ten years for a period of two years. Maintenance actions for erosion control, LRAM, range maintenance, and roads and grounds maintenance will be scheduled during the first year each training area is scheduled for rest and repair, although emergency actions to repair damage must take place anytime, anyplace. Proposed actions for 2002 – 2006 are shown in Table 4-3.”

- Section 4.2.4.2 Erosion Control has been revised.

The following wording has been added to the Proposed Management Section: “At Fort Wainwright, a rotational system of rest, rehabilitation, erosion control, and LRAM will be implemented as part of the proposed action. Each training area on Fort Wainwright will be taken out of rotation and placed off limits to military and recreational vehicle once every ten years for a period of two years. Maintenance actions for erosion control, LRAM, range maintenance, and roads and grounds maintenance will be scheduled during the first year each training area is scheduled for rest and repair, although emergency actions must take place anytime, anyplace. Proposed actions for 2002 – 2006 are shown in Table 4-14.”

- Figure 6-1a. Outdoor Recreation Areas map has been revised.

The following text has been removed: “Airboat Restrictions: Airboats are permitted on the channels of Wood and Tanana Rivers, and Salchaket Slough outside of impact areas, they may no enter Tanana Flats”

Legend removed and replaced with the following text:

“Open Use Area: Open to all recreational activities.

Modified Use Area: Open to all recreational activities during frozen conditions (6+ inches of ice and snow cover). Open to all non-motorized recreational activities year round.

Limited Use Area: Open to all non-motorized recreation (hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, skiing, and berry picking).

Closed Area: Closed to all recreational activities year round. Airfields, Tank Farm, Landfill, Small Arms Ranges, Impact Areas, Ammunition Storage Point.

Summer Trails: Summer trails are open to ORVs under 1,500 pounds (ATV's, snowmachines, dirt bikes etc.) all year round. Summer Trails are open to ORV's over 1,500 pounds (road vehicles, dune buggies, Argo's, SUSV's etc.) when there is 6+ inches of ice and snow cover.

Winter Trails: Winter trails are open to all ORVs when there is 6+ inches of ice and snow cover.

Motorized Watercraft Trails: All motorized watercraft may use only existing naturally occurring channels, watercourses, and waterways. Area is open to ORVs during frozen conditions.

- Figure 6-1d. Recreational Use Impact Study Areas map has been added.
- Section 6.2.4 Outdoor Recreation Management Areas has replaced with the following:

“Recreational Use Management Areas: Fort Wainwright is managed for a number of different types of public recreational use. All areas that are determined open for recreational use may be closed temporarily during periods of military use. All users must daily check in with Fort Wainwright Range Control Office to determine if areas are open to recreational use. USARAK uses the following classification system to classify recreation areas on the installation. These overlays are available to the public by contacting the Fort Wainwright Range Control Office.

Open: recreational areas open to all types of recreation during all seasons, unless closed by the Fort Wainwright Range Control Office.

Modified: recreational areas open to all non-motorized recreation (hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, skiing, and berry picking) but do not support and are not open to any type of ORV activity, except when there is 6+ inches of ice and snow cover.

Limited: recreational areas open to all non-motorized recreation (hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, skiing, and berry picking), but do not support and are not open to any type of ORV at any time.

Off-limits: areas restricted to public access and use year round.

Summer Trails: Summer trails are open to ORVs under 1,500 pounds (ATV's, snowmachines, dirt bikes etc.) all year round. Summer Trails are open to ORV's over 1,500 pounds (road vehicles, dune buggies, Argo's, SUSV's etc.) when there is 6+ inches of ice and snow cover.

Winter Trails: Winter trails are open to all ORVs when there is 6+ inches of ice and snow cover.

Motorized Watercraft Trails: All motorized watercraft may use only existing naturally occurring channels, watercourses, and waterways. Area is open to ORVs during frozen conditions. Motorized watercraft must maintain safe and prudent speed at all times.

These areas are shown in figures 6-1a, 6-1b and 6-1c.”

- Section 6.2.4 Outdoor Recreation Proposed Management has been revised:

The following wording has been added to the proposed management section: “In addition to continuing current outdoor recreation management, USARAK proposes to implement a new ORV use policy, a new recreational use impact study in TFTA, a new Training Area Recovery Plan, a new hunting, trapping, and fishing (HTF) permit process, and a new call-in system for recreational users. A summary of proposed management actions is shown in Table 6-5.

USARAK is proposing to implement a new recreational vehicle use policy on Fort Wainwright. The 1998-2002 Fort Wainwright INRMP determined that certain recreational vehicle use was incompatible with resource stewardship goals in the TFTA and proposed that a new ORV use policy be reviewed and implemented in the 2002-2006 update. Studies indicate that recreational vehicle use is damaging wetlands in TFTA and is increasing. The National Environmental Policy Act and Army Regulation 200-3 state that any activity suspected of causing environmental impacts is to be stopped until study proves otherwise. USARAK reviewed existing Alaska Federal and State Land Use and Off Road Vehicle

policies. EO 11989 (Off-Road Vehicles on Public Lands) states that “ the respective agency head shall, whenever he determines that the use of off-road vehicles will cause or is causing considerable adverse effects on the soil, vegetation, wildlife, wildlife habitat or cultural or historic resources of particular areas or trails of the public lands, immediately close such areas or trails to the type of off-road vehicle causing such effects, until such time as such adverse effects have been eliminated and that measures have been taken implemented to prevent such occurrence”. The USFWS recommends a conservative management approach, which includes placing fen wetlands off limits to airboat activity. The current ORV use policy leaves USARAK open to potential litigation (for instance, the National Park Service received an injunction to stop airboat use until they completed an Environmental Impact Study). More importantly, TFTA promises to play a key role in the success of the proposed transformation of the 172nd Infantry Brigade to an Interim Brigade Combat Team. It is USARAK’s goal to allow the maximum amount of recreational access and use (both public and military) within the framework of the military mission and the capability of the environment to sustain that use. USARAK also has a Federal resource stewardship responsibility to ensure that these public lands are maintained for perpetuity. After review of existing Alaska Federal and State land use and off road vehicle policies, USARAK intends to emulate these policies in managing its withdrawn lands. Pursuant to EO 11989, the ORV Recreational Access Policy has been proposed to place the same limitations on recreational access within Fort Wainwright as already apply to military vehicles.

The new recreational vehicle use policy will allow access within TFTA to areas that can support motorized recreational vehicle use without damaging sensitive wetlands. In 1999, USARAK obtained a five-year Section 404 Clean Water Act wetlands permit from the Corps of Engineers that restricts military vehicular maneuver in sensitive wetlands while the ground is unfrozen. Through the permitting process, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) were instrumental in helping the Corps of Engineers develop the criteria for defining these sensitive wetlands. As part of its land stewardship responsibilities, USARAK is proposing to impose the same limitations on recreational use in sensitive wetlands that USARAK already has imposed on military use.

TFTA is a valuable and important training area for both the Army and Air Force in Alaska. While military vehicular maneuver is restricted from sensitive wetlands during the summer, TFTA provides many other vital training opportunities all year round. TFTA will play an important role in the transformation of the 172nd Infantry Brigade to an Interim Brigade Combat Team. Until now, few conflicts have occurred between recreational users and military training in TFTA because of the excellent cooperation between the public and civilian users and the military. However, the amount of airboat use in TFTA continues to increase (almost 20% since 1989). During that same time period, the number of areas available for airboat use has decreased (Copper River Delta Area closed in mid 1990’s, Minto Flats closed in 1995 and Nenana Controlled Use Area closed in 1996, and Bristol Bay Controlled Use Area limited entry in 2002). The recreational vehicle use pressure on TFTA will continue to increase. Increased use of the TFTA by recreational vehicle users and anticipated increases in use by USARAK as a result of transformation may lead to significant conflicts.

Recreational use on Fort Wainwright is damaging sensitive wetlands. On TFTA, airboats are primarily used from May through October for hunting, and recreation. Airboats are well suited for use on the shallow Chena and Tanana Rivers, as well as on a unique system of floating mat fens in TFTA (Racine et. al. 1998). Since these floating mat fens are characterized as sensitive wetlands in the Clean Water Act Section 404 military use wetlands permit, USARAK is proposing management action to minimize impacts to these sensitive wetlands from both military and recreational users. Based on research concluded to date , the USFWS has concluded that changes in the fen habitats of the Tanana Flats are occurring as a result of airboat activity. Preliminary evidence based on the 1989 study on the environmental impacts of airboats on the Tanana Flats suggested that the floating mats should be fairly resistant to airboat damage (Racine et. al 1990). However, further evidence, as outlined in a more

detailed 1995 study appearing in Arctic, showed that “the vegetation and soils of floating mat fens in the Tanana Flats have been severely damaged along main airboat trails: there are over 100 km of trails with open-water, stream-like channels on which all of the emergent vegetation and about 50% of the underlying mat have been destroyed” (Racine et. al. 1998).

Environmental impacts from recreational use on Fort Wainwright are increasing. “In 1989, the total length of trails was 263 km, of which 37% (99 km) were heavily used main trails, 54% (143 km) were less-used secondary trails, and 8% (22 km) were trails on existing streams. By 1995, the total length of airboat trails had increased by 15%, to 303 km. During that period, trails were extended toward the southeast into the Tanana Flats, from 17 km from the Tanana River access points in 1989 to 26 km by 1995.” (Racine et. al. 1998). By 1999, total length of trails in northwest TFTA had expanded to 314 km. These 314 km trails impact approximately 161 acres of sensitive wetlands, 78 acres of which are permanently damaged by main trails (USARAK, 2001), which do not recover within a few years like abandoned secondary trails (Racine et. al. 1998).

The proposed ORV policy does not restrict hunting on Fort Wainwright, except in impact areas. Hunters may continue to use airboats to hunt in the TFTA, although airboats must comply with the requirements stated above. Limitations on the use of motorized watercraft is not expected to affect subsistence users. USARAK allows the same exceptions to handicapped individuals for hunting from motorized vehicles as does the State of Alaska.

The proposed ORV use policy will not significantly impact game management on Fort Wainwright. The Wildlife Conservation Division of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game states the proposed ORV restrictions will not significantly impact their management goals for the flats or hunter success rates overall. In calendar year 2000, ADF&G also stated that 618 moose were officially reported taken in Unit 20a, but only 38 were reported taken by airboat. Statewide harvest totals for moose have not significantly changed since 1990, even though seasonal restrictions on the use of any motorized vehicles for big game hunting have been implemented in a number of areas, such as Delta, Glacier Mountain, Wood River, Macomb Plateau, Yanert, and LaDue River Controlled Use Areas. The Sport Fish Division states that there is little game fish utilization in areas of the Tanana Flats that are not directly connected to river systems. Fishing that does occur in the area within the streams and sloughs will remain open to public access. Angling opportunity should not be impacted (negatively or beneficially) by the proposed access restrictions.

USARAK is proposing to implement a Training Area Recovery Plan (TARP) program, a rotational system of rest, rehabilitation, and erosion control as part of the proposed action (see Section 4.1.4.1). Each training area on Fort Wainwright will be taken out of rotation and placed off limits to military and recreational vehicle once every ten years for a period of two years. Maintenance actions for erosion control, LRAM, range maintenance, and roads and grounds maintenance will be scheduled during the first year each training area is scheduled for rest and repair, although emergency actions to repair damage must take place anytime, anyplace.

USARAK is proposing to conduct another more detailed study to assess the impacts of recreational vehicles on sensitive wetlands and to evaluate the potential indirect impacts on hydrology, effects of noise on wildlife, and conflicts among hunters. During the multi-year study, the study area will be divided into three parts. One part will be open to all types of recreational use with no restrictions or limitations, one part will be placed totally off limits to all military and recreational vehicle use (except those involved in the study), and the third part will be used only for controlled experiments to determine impacts. The proposed study boundaries are shown in Figure 6-1d. The study boundaries may be subject to modification based on the requirements of the experimental design parameters. A small amount of currently used trails must be included in the off limits areas for the study to study regeneration. If the

study reveals at any time significant damage occurring in the portion of the study area open to all types of recreational use, USARAK may choose to place limitations on recreational use as described above. If the study reveals that there are no significant long-term impacts to sensitive wetlands from recreational vehicle use, then USARAK will re-evaluate the proposed ORV access policy in five years during the next update of the INRMP.”

- Section 6.4.4 Cultural Resources Management has been revised.

The following wording has been deleted: “Excluded projects are:

- Maintenance work on existing features, such as roads, fire lanes, mowed areas, active disposal areas, and manmade ditches, waterways, and ponds, when no new ground disturbance is proposed.
 - Outdoor recreational programs including hunting, fishing, and nonconsumptive uses in accordance with Fort Wainwright and Army regulations.
 - The following natural resources management activities: timber harvests, tree plantings, planting and maintenance of wildlife food and shrub plots in previously disturbed areas, prescribed burning of rangeland, and improvement of existing stream crossings.
 - Planting, cultivating, and harvesting of existing crops not exceeding the depth of existing activities.
 - Removal and replacement in kind of plant materials when they pose an imminent hazard to people or structures.
 - Ordnance disposal in accordance with prescribed Fort Wainwright, Army, and Department of Defense regulations.”
- The Finding of No Significant Impact statement has been removed from Appendix A and added as a stand alone document directly preceding the appendices.
 - Specific items of cooperation between US Army Alaska, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Bureau of Land Management has been revised and is now included in Appendix A.
 - A draft Memorandum of Understanding between US Army Alaska and Bureau of Land Management for management of all Army lands in Alaska has been added in Appendix B.
 - Appendix H. Response to Public Comments on Draft FWA INRMP has been added.

INTEGRATED NATURAL RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT PLAN
2002-2006

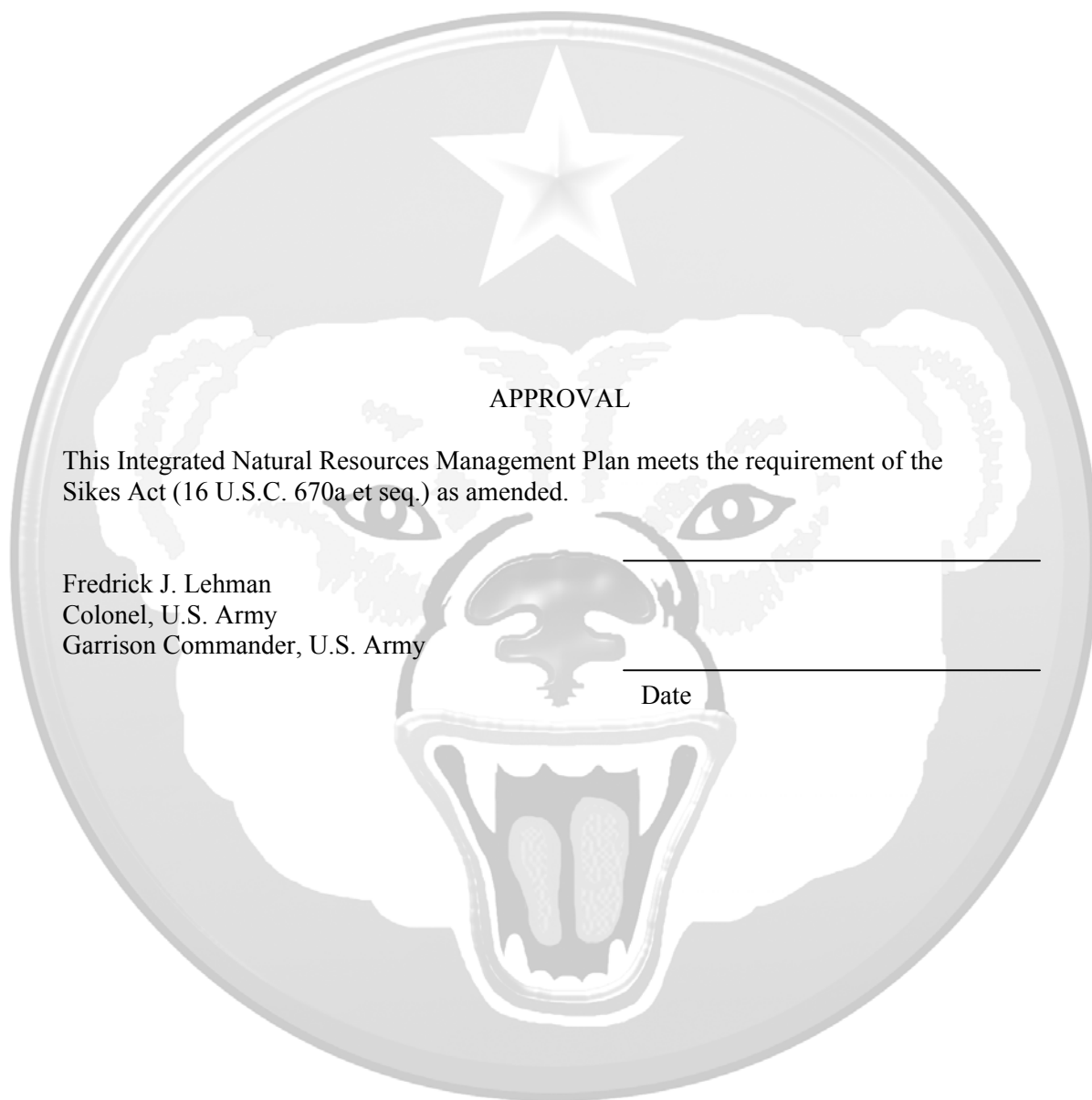
U.S. ARMY ALASKA
VOLUME 3 – FORT WAINWRIGHT

APPROVAL

This Integrated Natural Resources Management Plan meets the requirement of the
Sikes Act (16 U.S.C. 670a et seq.) as amended.

Fredrick J. Lehman
Colonel, U.S. Army
Garrison Commander, U.S. Army

Date



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Henri Bisson
State Director, Alaska
Bureau of Land Management

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Date

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Frank Rue
Commissioner
Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Date

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VOLUME 3 – FORT WAINWRIGHT

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